



Aruba's Barracudas are off to compete in Rome, Italy!

Today, nine young women of Aruba synchronized swimming team, The Barracudas, are boarding the plane to Rome, to compete for the first time in the European Cup and the Roma Syncro that will take place from May 31 to June 3. The young women have been training hard in preparation for a summer filled with international competitions, beginning in Italy this week.

Last week, Aruba staged the island's qualifying competitions, the National Synchronized Swimming Championships. The European Cup and the Pan American Games that will take place at the end of July only allow nine entrants from each country, so The Barracudas have been going through a tough process of qualifying since January to select the top performers to represent Aruba. The oldest team member at twenty-four is Charlene de Cuba, a former Barracuda that went to Holland to get her university education, but returned to Aruba recently and is again participating. Charlene is a bronze medal winner in the Dutch Kingdom games.

Additionally representing Aruba at the European Cup are triple gold medal winner Devah Leenheer, Carondina Leijdekkers, Anouk and Kristan Eman, Margie Kelders, Anna Posner, and Kiara van Tright. These are the island's senior and most experienced swimmers, as "they can expect some very tough competition" revealed Secretary-General of the Aruba Swimming Federation, Nicole Hoevertsz. Nicole, a former Olympiad representing Aruba in synchronized swimming, is one of the fourteen women that is a member of the 115 member International Olympic Committee. She stated that the federation is taking this step, the first competition for The Barracudas in a European event "because the judges need to get to know our swimmers. The sport is judged on a very subjective basis, and if they don't know you, chances are slim that a team will be judged only on their performance. They need this exposure in international competition."

Aruba's swimmers recently participated in the U.S. National's, "for the experience, and we are thrilled with the results," expressed Nicole. "They received very, very high scores, which is extremely encouraging. Our choices of competitions are part of a long-term strategy, with qualifying for the Olympics in 2008 the final goal. Presently, Aruba dominates in the Caribbean, having been the champions for the last eight years, now it is time for the team to experience international competition, which is another level entirely." Aruba's team will be competing against twenty other teams while in Rome, and two professional coaches, Kenra Zanotto, an Olympic bronze medalist from the U.S., and Kelly McDonald of Canada are accompanying them along with their Aruban coaches.

The last week in June the federations will send a full team of twenty-one swimmers to the Confederation Centroamericana, (CCCAN,) junior competitions in El Salvador, for ages eighteen and under. The team of nine will again represent Aruba in Rio de Janeiro at the Pan American Games during the last week of July. Prior to the games, they will attend two weeks of training in Brazil, as part of a program offered by various Latin America nations. Athletes from small countries such as Aruba, with limited facilities, have been invited to train alongside professional athletes in preparation for the 2008 games in Beijing, and Aruba is taking advantage of this program in a number of disciplines.

The European Cup will be a test of Aruba's young synchronized swimmers; an exciting exposure to the demands of truly international competition, and the first step on the road to Beijing.